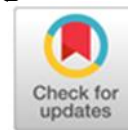


Reframing silence: Insights into language learners' thoughts about silence and speaking-related anxiety

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ABSTRACT

For some language learners, feeling too nervous to speak in the target language in the classroom can generate an array of negative thoughts; from frustration due to missed speaking practice opportunities to anxiety over their language skills (Curry, Maher, & Peeters, 2020). Using King's (2014; King & Smith, 2017) cognitive-behavioural model of silent L2 learners' anxiety, this paper examines the relationship between language learners' anxiety and in-class silent behaviour in the context of a Japanese university EFL classroom. Forty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 participants who felt that anxiety limited their in-class oral participation. Initially, almost all the participants attributed their silence and speaking anxiety to a lack of linguistic ability, such as insufficient vocabulary or poor pronunciation. However, more potent underlying factors were revealed during the reframing exercise, suggesting that anxiety related to social performance and interpersonal relationships with peers also triggered their silent behaviours.



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1. Introduction

Silence is a neutral communicative behaviour, with positive or negative evaluations attached by those interpreting it (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985). In the foreign language classroom, where vocal participation is often expected, student silent behaviour can often be interpreted as unfavourable, signifying a breakdown in the learner's speaking ability or engagement in the class (King, 2013). Much research has also been done into the positive functions of classroom silence. Harumi (2015) has shown how wait time allows learners more time to respond, increasing output. Likewise, Bao's (2014) work has emphasised the benefits of incorporating pedagogical silences to facilitate cognitive processing and reflection. However, while existing research has provided significant insights into the functions of language learners' classroom silence that go beyond teachers' interpretations, how do learners interpret their silence in relation to their language ability? While some learners may not notice or worry about a silent display, learners who are anxious about speaking the target language in the classroom may perceive their silence as a significant moment that confirms their self-doubts about their ability (Maher, 2020). This study examines anxious language learners' perceptions of their classroom silence and how it connects to their negative emotions about speaking the target language.

2. A review of anxious language learners' silence

Understandably, a language learner who is anxious about speaking in the target language may be more silent than others in the class. They may choose to avoid what is making them nervous, using

silence as a form of safety behaviour (King, 2014). Alternatively, their volition to speak is overridden by their negative emotions (Curry et al., 2020). When examining the relationship between silence and anxiety in the language classroom, however, it is important to recognise that an anxious learner's silent display may not always be significant or negative. Not all silence is meaningful or communicatively relevant (Saville-Troike, 1985). Even an anxious learner could just be distracted by something unrelated to the speaking activity. In addition, Bao (2014) has shown that silent behaviour can be a helpful and necessary learning space for language learners. Similarly, Harumi's study (2015) of wait time in English language classes revealed that some Japanese learners perceive silence as a "'desirable space" for learning' that facilitates comprehension and output (p. 128).

However, whether the intention of the silence is facilitative or not, classroom silence can become problematic and negatively impact an anxious learner's speaking performance depending on how they perceive their silence and others' evaluations of their behaviour. Anxious learners may experience negative emotions about their silence (Smith & King, 2018). In an environment where talk is often expected (Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2016), silence may lead to embarrassment, fear and anger. These emotions could intensify and emphasise their silence, increasing their negative thoughts as they interpret their speaking performance. For an anxious learner, these factors may include negative thoughts about how they perceive their proficiency in the target language and how their oral participation and performance are being academically and socially evaluated by teachers and classmates (Maher, 2020). They may also worry about negative perceptions of their willingness to communicate (WTC) (MacIntyre, 2007), ability to speak, or degree of engagement in the speaking activity or class in general. Therefore, recurrent silent behaviour in the language classroom limits not only opportunities for developing speaking skills, but also can impact anxious learners who fear being negatively evaluated by teachers and peers due to their silent behaviour.

The importance of examining how anxious language learners perceive their silent behaviour and the impact their interpretations of it have on their speaking is demonstrated in King's cognitive-behavioural model of a silent L2 learner's social anxiety (Fig. 1) (King, 2014; King & Smith, 2017). This model illustrates the interrelated nature of an anxious language learner's silent behaviours and negative thoughts. It demonstrates how their in-class oral participation is influenced by worries of how others may interpret their speaking performance and how they attach significance to their silence. The model identifies two types of negative thoughts an anxious learner may have: feared predictions and self-focus image. Feared predictions are where the anxious learner focuses on the possible adverse consequences of using the target language. These types of thoughts tend to involve self-doubt about their proficiency and expectations of negative evaluations of their performance by those around them, such as classmates and teachers. An anxious learner may fear making a mistake and avoid speaking as they do not want to show a less than perfect performance (Gegersen & Horwitz, 2002; Kitano, 2001). They may also fear that if they try to speak but are silent, their classmates will feel uncomfortable or bored by their behaviour and negatively react to them, for example, a facial expression showing their annoyance (Maher, 2020; Maher & King, 2020). Self-focus image thoughts are where anxious learners become hyperaware of their target language performance and how others perceive them. They may negatively compare their performance with their peers, often perceiving others as more fluent (Curry, 2014). They may also worry that their classmates may notice their anxiety if they are silent, revealing their lack of language ability (Maher, 2020). Anxious learners may attribute various meanings to their in-class silent displays, triggering negative thoughts. This then heightens their anxiety about using the target language, often leading to more silence.

King's (2014; King & Smith, 2017) model also highlights the role of immediate contextual factors and higher-level socio-cultural factors. These factors form part of a complex dynamic system that can involve the learner's personality, the nature of the learning task, and interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers. In the Japanese context, previous learning experiences of English at junior high school and high school have been found to be influential (Effiong, 2016). Studies have shown that the pedagogical focus on developing students' vocabulary and grammar

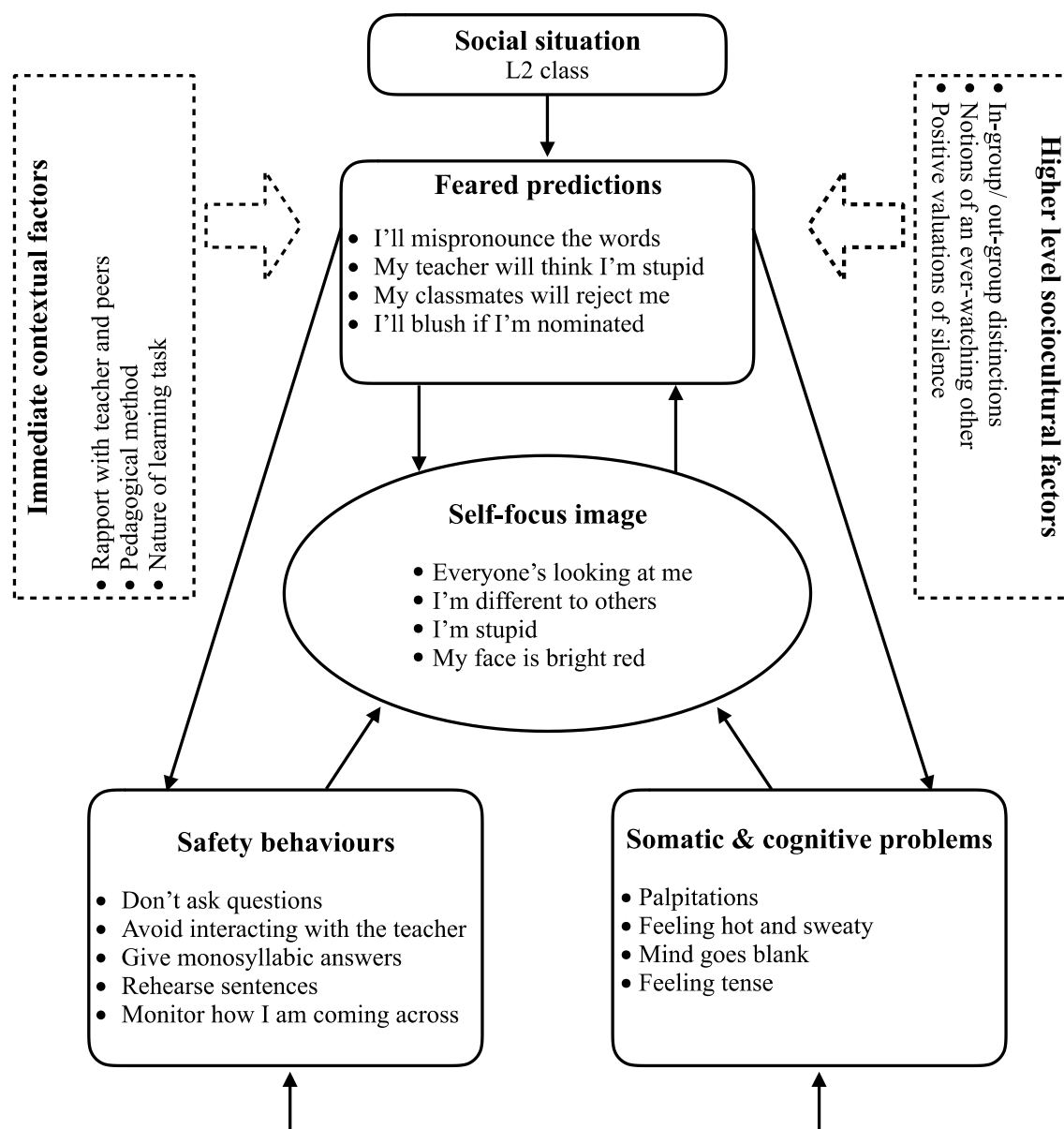


Fig. 1. Cognitive-behavioural model of a silent L2 learner's social anxiety (King, 2014; King & Smith, 2017)

knowledge to prepare for high-stakes entrance exams tends to result in less emphasis on communicative output (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Shachter, 2018). Moreover, it has been found that the socio-cultural norms in Japanese schools mean that classes are often teacher-centred and emphasise listening over speaking, establishing silence as the expected behaviour for learners (Aspinall, 2006). For some learners, the lack of speaking experience in the target language before entering university can make the adaptation to more communicative-style classes anxiety-inducing (Shachter, 2018), while some studies found that Japanese students worry that speaking the target language in class will disturb their classmates, negatively impacting their interpersonal relationships with peers (Bao, 2014; Greer, 2000; King, 2013). Studies from various fields into the behaviour of silence have illustrated how interpretations should use a relativist approach that considers the context-dependent nature of silence (see Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985). The language classroom, with its own culture and agenda, means that classroom silence has an array of complexities and factors to examine when looking at the causes of the silence of an anxious learner and what influences their perceptions of their in-class participatory behaviours.

A further element of complexity when examining perceptions of classroom silence is learner individuality and the diverse forms of silent behaviour that an anxious learner might display - most language teachers recognise that even anxious learners are seldom entirely reticent. An individual's silent behaviour may change in different situations and at different moments in their language learning journey. Furthermore, different forms of silent behaviour will impact learners in different ways. For example, while some learners may not attach any meaning to a pause during their speaking turn, for others, a pause may signify a lack of fluency and trigger negative thoughts. Therefore, any approach to investigating classroom silence that simplifies silence to a single form, may limit what can be understood. Previous studies have illustrated how silence does not appear in a single form; it is not just the absence of sound or the opposite of talk. To illustrate the possible forms of classroom silence, Fig. 2 (Maher & King, 2020) provides an overview of silent behaviours observed in foreign language learning environments (Bao, 2014; Gilmore, 1985; Harumi, 2015; Jaworski, 1993; King, 2013; McVeigh, 2002; Nakane, 2007; Peng, 2012; Saville-Troike, 1985; Tannen, 1985). King's (2013) study, where he observed 900 hours of Japanese foreign language university classes, recorded multiple forms of student silence, such as not initiating talk, taking on the listener role and making short utterances. Similarly, in Maher and King's (2020) observational study of Japanese foreign language university classes where silence was identified as a non-verbal cue of anxiety, various forms of silent behaviours were noted, including pauses and use of L1. Therefore, when considering anxious learners' classroom silence, an anti-essentialist (Jaworski, 1993), approach to viewing silence can provide insights into learners' interpretations of their in-class participatory behaviours by recognising individual differences.

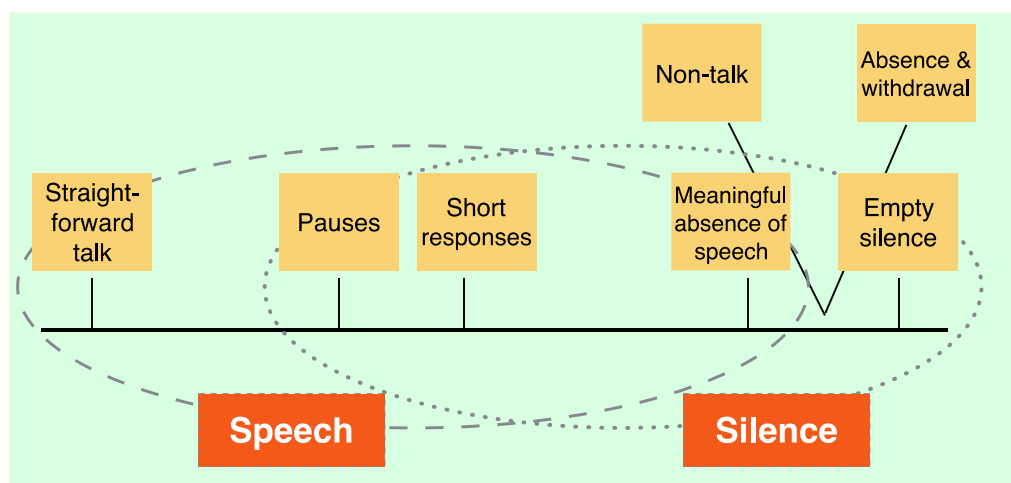


Fig. 2. Continuum of speech-silence: Silent behaviours observed in foreign language learning environments (Maher & King, 2020)

The highly complex and affective nature of classroom silence suggests that this behaviour limits opportunities for developing speaking skills and can also trigger negative thoughts and feed into speaking anxiety. If an anxious learner feels too nervous about speaking in the target language in the classroom, despite having the volition, this could lead to frustration due to missed speaking practice opportunities or self-doubt about their language skills. Also, even if the silence is facilitative, such as a pause to prepare what they want to say, if the learner is anxious about speaking, they might become overly aware of themselves and their in-class performance, fearing negative evaluations by teachers and peers. Having a deeper understanding of how anxious learners perceive their classroom silence has the potential for developing interventions that can support learners who are nervous about speaking. The purpose of this study is to build on the previous work discussed in this literature review and contribute to the ongoing body of research that aims to put 'silence at the very heart of the investigation' into anxiety through a student-centred approach (King & Smith, 2017, p. 106).

3. The study

3.1. Research aims and questions

This qualitative study was an exploratory examination of silence and speaking anxiety in the foreign language classroom to find out how learners' in-class silent behaviours affect their oral participation. The main aims were to investigate the forms and functions of classroom silence from the perspective of participants who identified as anxious English speakers through multiple in-depth interviews. The research questions were:

RQ1: What forms of classroom silence did the participants describe?

RQ2: What factors did the participants perceive as causing their classroom silence?

3.2. Context and participants

This study took place in a medium-sized private institution located in a metropolitan area in Honshu, Japan's main island. The university has a foreign studies faculty with several specialised language departments. I recruited 17 participants by advertising on campus for a research project about speaking anxiety in class. Fourteen of the participants were English majors, and three were in the Global Studies faculty taking courses delivered in English. Thirteen participants were first-year students, and four were in their second year. Proficiency levels varied from intermediate to advanced based on the institution's placement tests. After participants consented to take part in the study, I asked them to complete a Japanese translation of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Yashima et al., 2009). The FLCAS is a 33-item self-report questionnaire to assess factors related to communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. I chose the FLCAS as it is a commonly used tool for measuring FLA to gauge their anxiety level before the first interview. Thirteen participants returned the questionnaire. Twelve participants scored a medium level of anxiety (76-119), and one participant score showed a high level of anxiety (125). Over ten weeks, I conducted two to three interviews with each participant for an average of 50 minutes, totalling 45 interviews and generating a corpus of around 135,000 words.

3.3. Cognitive-behavioural theory-based approach

As the aim of this study was to look at anxious learners' thoughts about their classroom silence to see how they impact their participatory behaviours, I designed this study using a Cognitive-behavioural theory-based (CBT) approach. CBT is a psychological intervention that has been used to reduce anxiety. It focuses on creating a formulation of the cognitive distortions (negative thoughts and beliefs) and behaviours that can affect emotional regulation and identifying what factors can trigger a person's anxiety. By making the person aware of how their negative thoughts affect what they feel and do, they can learn how to manage their negative thoughts to achieve behavioural goals (Kennerley, Kirk, & Westbrook, 2017). This study builds on previous works which have used similar psychological-based approaches to examining language anxiety in the Japanese context: Toyama & Yamazaki's (2019) rational emotive therapy-based class activities for anxiety reduction, Curry's (2014) cognitive-behavioural therapy-based activities, and Maher's (2020) study using a CBT-based approach to investigate the relationship between anxiety and silence.

For the interviews, I used elements from CBT formulation. A CBT formulation uses insights gathered from the individual's perceptions of their anxiety. By collecting evidence of their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, the individual becomes aware of the influence of their thoughts over their emotions and behaviours and the negative cycle that can emerge (Fig. 3) (Kennerley et al., 2017). I also used a reframing activity which is an exercise to identify triggers of negative thoughts and then challenge these thoughts by asking the person to search for evidence to support their perceptions and consider other possible interpretations. This activity aims to help the person to become more objective in how they interpret their situation (Stallard, 2002). I chose a reframing activity to show participants how their negative thoughts about silence could be affecting them.

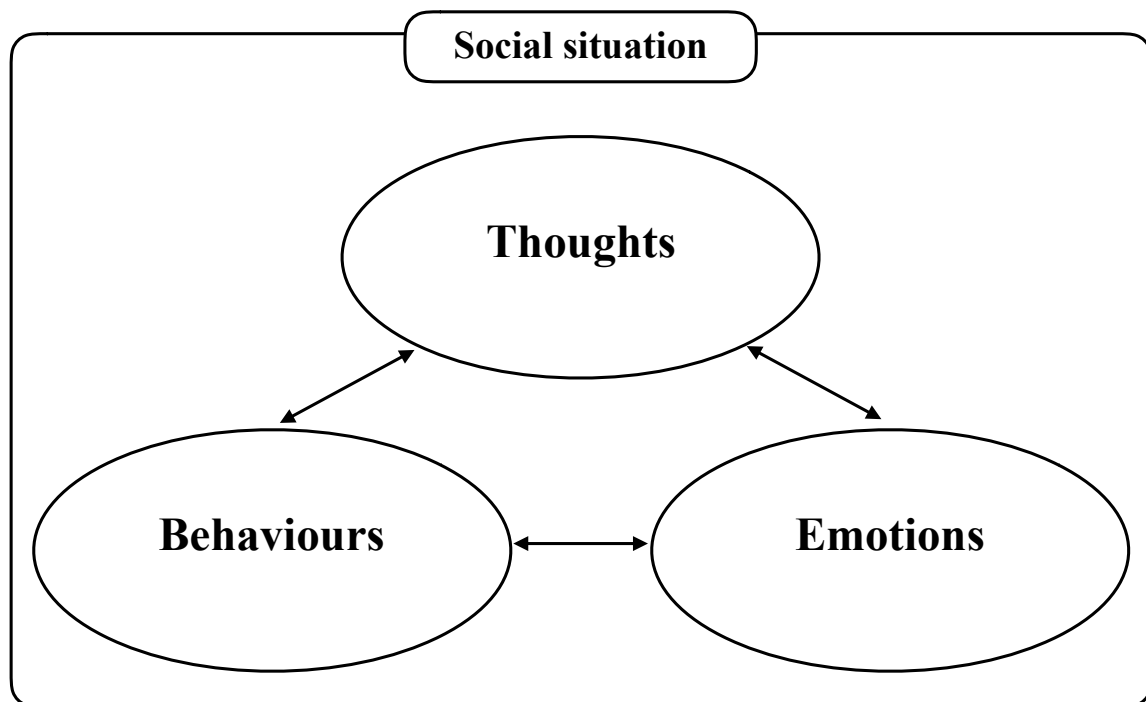


Fig. 3. CBT cycle (based on Kennerley et al., 2017, Maher, 2020)

3.4. Interviews

The first interview was an assessment to identify in-class speaking situations where the participants tended to feel nervous and described not being able to speak or not wanting to speak (silent behaviours). The schedule contained adapted items from existing instruments used to diagnose social anxiety in clinical settings and assess foreign language anxiety (Table 1). The interview schedule contained nine scenarios of speaking English in the classroom, for example, speaking with classmates that are friends, speaking with unfamiliar classmates, speaking in front of the class and speaking to the teacher. After participants described their thoughts, feelings and behaviours about each speaking situation, I asked them to think about what was causing their silence and anxiety - that is, what was preventing them from achieving their speaking goals in each case. At the end of the assessment interview, I recapped what we had talked about and asked the participant which situations, or speaking goals, they wanted to focus on in the following interviews.

Table 1. Instruments for assessment interview items

Instrument	Purpose
Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), (Horwitz et al., 1986) Managing your Emotions for Language Learning (MYE), (Gkonou & Oxford, 2016)	Context specific
State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger et al., 1983)	General anxiety
Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale (LSAS) (Liebowitz, 1987) Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) (Connor et al., 2000) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) (Leary, 1983)	Social anxiety, avoidance and fear

In the second interview, we created a formulation by discussing the in-class speaking situations the participants wanted to focus on in depth from the assessment interview. I asked the participants to tell me recent examples of these situations to gather further evidence of their silence and anxious feelings. After they described the details, including the nature of the task and who was involved, I went through the CBT formulation to elicit thoughts, emotions, behaviours (Fig. 3). The aim was to formulate the negative cycle of their speaking-related anxiety and silence in various class speaking situations to gain insights into how their negative thoughts may have been connecting their behaviours (silence) and emotions (anxiety). At each stage of eliciting the cycle elements, I encouraged the participants to explain why they might have had those thoughts and feelings and how they felt about

their speaking and silent behaviours. I also asked them about what had happened before the situation they described to see if they could think of reasons that had triggered this negative cycle (Corrie, Townend, & Cockx, 2016; Kennerley et al., 2017). After formulating two to three examples of their negative cycles, I asked participants to repeat the process for positive examples of speaking in class, such as feeling confident, enjoyment or satisfaction with their performance. After co-constructing negative and positive cycles, I asked the participants to compare them and think about what different and possible reasons was why. This was to investigate what factors may have triggered or maintained their anxiety and silent behaviours.

In the final interview, using one of the participants' negative in-class speaking examples, we did a reframing activity to challenge their negative thoughts about their silent displays by searching for evidence to support them and considering alternative, more objective perspectives. This was based on Stallard's 'Looking for evidence' activity (2002, p. 84). After selecting a situation to focus on, I asked participants to list the negative thoughts they had at the time, followed by any evidence they could think of that supported these thoughts. For example, if one of their negative thoughts was 'If I speak, I will bore my partner.' I asked them to think of evidence to support this, for example, 'They looked bored' and got them to describe their partner's appearance and what cues they noticed which they interpreted as boredom. Then, I asked them to think of evidence that could challenge those negative thoughts, for example, 'It was a morning class, so they could have been sleepy,' or 'Perhaps they were listening and trying to understand.' We then used the 'So what?' questioning technique (Stallard, 2002) to think about how they could deal with such a negative situation. For example, 'Even if your partner was bored, so what?' The aim of this was to encourage the participant to go deeper into their negative thoughts to see if there were any underlying factors that acted as a trigger to make them aware of what was potentially causing their anxiety about speaking and resulting silent behaviour.

3.5. Data analysis

Before each interview, I reminded the participants that they could use Japanese or English, and an interpreter was available if they wanted. All participants chose to use English for most of the interviews, occasionally using some Japanese. I transcribed the Japanese parts into Japanese before translating them into English. Having lived in Japan for almost 15 years, I was confident that my socio-cultural competence and language knowledge was adequate to act as one of the translators. However, I was aware of how language barriers might have affected my understanding and interpretations, so I used an independent translator to check the transcription before making a technically accurate translation to compare with my translation and interpretative notes (Richards, 2003; Squires, 2009). To analyse the interviews, I used a qualitative data analysis programme. I created a detailed codebook to record how I assigned codes for consistency. I used interpretative codes in the first rounds of coding to remain open to what the data was telling me. In further rounds, I used codes from King's model and CBT terms from the formulation diagram. After these initial rounds of coding, I used iterative categorisation (Neale, 2016) to summarise the data for each code to consider the best fit through constant comparison.

4. Findings and discussion

In this section, I will first present the forms of silent behaviours that participants described when giving examples of experiencing speaking-related anxiety in the foreign language classroom and examine the three forms most mentioned. Then, I look at the participants' explanations of what led to these moments of silence and speaking-related anxiety, focusing on the reasons they initially gave after describing their silent displays and negative emotions. Finally, I analyse the factors that emerged during the CBT-based reframing exercise and how some participants' perceptions of their silence changed during the interviews. Pseudonyms have been used in the interview extracts.

4.1. Forms of in-class silent behaviour

After analysing the data from the assessment interviews, I created five categories to represent the forms of silence from participants' descriptions of their in-class behaviours when experiencing speaking-related anxiety. Table 2 presents these forms and the number of participants who described each one (some participants reporting multiple forms). The three most frequent were taking a short speaking turn, using their L1 (Japanese), and pausing.

Table 2. Forms of silent behaviours

Forms of silent behaviour	Number of participants who described each form	Example extracts from participant interviews
Took a short speaking turn	7	Eri: In group work, my classmates speaking a lot, but I finished quickly. I spoke less than them. Nene: I had to speak for 90 seconds but I stopped early. Maybe one minute. Chika: That time, I couldn't understand what the teacher was saying, and the teacher picked me to answer a question. I panicked and couldn't speak then either, so..... (nervous laughter) I had trouble forming the past tense even.....my mind just went blank. So I stopped my answer.
Used their L1	7	Shotaro: I'm not good at speaking English. I want to speak English..... I do want to speak, but sometimes when I want to speak, I want to say it in Japanese. It's not that I don't want to speak English, but..... when I feel like it's too hard for me to say it in English, it becomes <i>shindoi</i> (tiring) for me. I know that I can make it easier by just using Japanese, so this 'change-back' is an option for me and then I start leaning towards using Japanese. Nari: Just in group work, I gave up speaking English, and maybe spoke Japanese. But, one-to-one, partner, maybe I used English more.
Paused	4	Shotaro: Speed is very slow. Other pairs' discussion was flowing quickly, so I felt like it is just me and my partner that is slow, because my fault. So I feel sorry to my partner. Yuma: I speak but I forgot my English. So I couldn't speak anything. I keep quiet. I had keep quiet so long. Many people looked at me, very confused. That's my trauma.
Did not initiate talk	3	Maki: I know the answer so I want to tell. But I don't. Runa: I never put up my hand in class. Eri: I wait for my partner to start conversation.
Took the listener role	3	Karin: I can ask questions, but then I stopped. Shinri - I thought I couldn't say my opinion, so I just listened to the others.

A 'short speaking turn' includes behaviours when a participant described a moment when they perceived an expectation (from a teacher, peers or themselves) to speak for longer, such as a single-word response when a sentence was expected, or not giving information that was requested (Jaworski, 2000; Nakane, 2007; Tannen, 1985). Other examples were being unable to achieve the goal in a timed-speaking task and speaking less than their classmates. Participants tended to refer to these moments as not speaking 'enough' - either an amount of time, level of details, or the number of speaking turns.

Another frequent form was using Japanese (L1) during speaking activities aimed at practising the target language. This type of silence was described when switching back to Japanese and when group members used Japanese. Examples ranged from short utterances such as using Japanese when they could not say the word in English to whole sentences, and in some cases, speaking Japanese for the entirety of the activity. Some expressed wanting to use the activity to practice speaking English but ended up speaking in Japanese, while a few expressed guilt towards their teacher and group members because the activity instructions specified that they use English. While a large body of research shows there are advantages of using L1 in the foreign language classroom, there is also a strong case that when learners' main opportunity to use the target language is in the classroom, using their L1 is less beneficial (Nation, 1997). Some of the participants talked about this form of silence as 'necessary' at times, but also tended to show disappointment at relying on their L1 to maintain their speaking turn. The following example from Eri's interview demonstrates this internal tussle between wanting to

speaking more and the feeling of relief when she was silent. In this example, Eri became anxious when speaking English with her partner, so she switched to Japanese.

Kate: After you changed to Japanese, how did you feel?

Eri: Ashamed, uncomfortable. And....relief.

Kate: Relief?

Eri: Oddly, I felt relief.

Kate: So, you had mixed feelings. You felt bad for speaking Japanese, but also it made you feel better?

Eri: Yes.

The third frequently mentioned form were pauses. The two main types of pauses described by participants were inter and intra-turn (Jaworski, 2000). Inter-turn pauses are a delayed start when the speaker responds to the interlocutor and occur at the beginning of their response. Participants reported a delay in starting their speaking turn when answering the teacher or question in a group, or starting the activity. Intra-turn pauses refer to pauses that occur mid-speech during the speaker's own turn, and examples included pausing mid-sentence, bringing their speaking turn to a stop. Although pauses can form breaks that give the listener time to comprehend and prepare their response and allow the speaker to do the same (Saville-Troike, 1985; Tannen, 1985), in this study, participants tended to perceive their pauses as a sign of poor speaking ability- a kind of 'mistake,' which they interpreted as a lack of fluency.

4.2. Factors that influenced in-class silent behaviours

After participants had described their in-class behaviours and feelings during speaking activities in the assessment interviews (first interview), I asked what they thought was causing their silence and anxiety. After coding the data, ten categories of explanations emerged (Table 3). The findings show that a dominant theme among the participants' initial explanations was doubting their English linguistic ability. Several participants attributed their silence and speaking anxiety to having a lack of linguistic knowledge or skills; insufficient vocabulary or poor pronunciation were frequently mentioned. Participants who reported these reasons tended to believe that if they improved their linguistic knowledge, such as memorising more vocabulary, they would speak more. Likewise, some felt that if they achieved a better score on the English language proficiency test for listening and reading skills (such as TOEIC), this would improve their fluency. Some participants reflected on their previous study habits, explaining that their current proficiency level was low because they had not studied English hard enough before entering university. A further example of doubting their ability was another frequently mentioned issue of making mistakes. Several participants perceived that their lack of linguistic ability caused them to make too many mistakes, making them anxious about speaking and often resulting in silence. So, while some participants expressed beliefs that interpersonal relationships with their peers influenced their silence and anxiety and the social performance of speaking English in the classroom, doubts about linguistic ability were prevalent as the initial reason for silence and speaking-related anxiety.

Like any subject or skill, learners generally want to improve, so, understandably, the participants in this study reflected on their linguistic ability. Also, considering the context of this study, these findings were perhaps somewhat expected as Japanese students have been found to express negative self-attribution (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009). Previous studies have also shown that linguistic concerns, such as making mistakes, are common (Gegersen & Horwitz, 2002; Young, 1991). Anxious learners tend to worry about how they can avoid making mistakes, and therefore, may use a moment of silence to locate appropriate vocabulary and expressions (Bao, 2014; Nakane, 2007). Others may decide to remain silent and display non-talk behaviour (Jaworski, 1993) rather than reveal their lack of vocabulary knowledge or 'unnatural' pronunciation (Gegersen and Horwitz, 2002).

Table 3. Participants' explanations of their silent behaviour

Categories of explanations	Number of participants who gave each explanation	Example extracts from participant interviews
Lack of vocabulary	7	Eri: I wanted to say something, quickly or naturally. And I think knowing variety of English expressions can get my English better than now. Shotaro: If I improved my vocabulary..... and <i>seirisuru</i> . If I can organise what I want to say more smoothly, I think I can be more fluent. Karin: Other people use sentences are more difficult, and longer than mine. Then, that makes me think I need to say longer. But simple English makes short sentences. But I can't speak long sentences either. So, I don't speak.
Worried about making mistakes	7	Hana: If I have more vocabulary and more knowledge, it feels easier maybe. Shotaro: If I told the classmate, I want to speak but.... I am no, no,..... Even if I try to say what I thinking, I make mistake. So, I don't speak so much. Taiga: If I miss the vocabulary, I tell my partner or someone wrong information. I feel scared about that. When I make mistake, I mean, I don't do anything and just sit down quietly.
Poor pronunciation	5	Runa: I worried about pronunciation. I can't say long sentences well now. It is hard for me. Hiro: Ashamed about pronunciation. Yuma: My pronunciation is not clear.
Did not study English well enough	3	Nene: I felt like challenge was a bit high. I understood, same level classmates gathered, but I felt gap and that these classmates studied English, more than me. I realised I hadn't studied properly. Ummm...for example, pronunciation and things. I felt like 'What should I do? I'm sorry, I can't speak!' It became like this, I didn't speak.
Interpersonal relationships with classmates	2	Maki: Depends on people. This happens. Classmates know each other, but I don't. It is a small group, so three people talk a lot because friends. But I can't join conversation, even I want to.
Feeling apologetic to their classmates	2	Eri: I feeling sorry, embarrassed. I keep distance from my classmates. I want to have easy conversations. But less confidence I have, so I often say 'I'm sorry.' Shotaro: My classmate speak to me, speak English to me in fluently. But I cannot answer, answer in English, so I am very sorry.
Japanese character	2	Shinri: It's not can or can't speak. When you meet someone from different country, you just think 'Say something.' Be active. But Japanese people have worry, and also thinking like 'silence is golden.' Takumi: It can't be helped, Japanese people are shy. And this a personality I think difficult. Japanese is also often shy.
Not enough speaking practice in high school English classes	2	Runa: Now chances to speak English increased since I entered in this university. More than before. So, I have not got used to it yet.
Worried about classmates' reactions	2	Shota: They want to so make a fool at me. Maybe they, what should i say? They want to stop my voice. Karin: Sober face looking at me, like waiting for me to say something. And when I can't anything to say and they are 'What is she trying to say?' Waiting for me to say, that makes me hurry and it harder to say something.
Worried about showing they feel nervous	1	Nene: They will see my red face. They know I can't speak.

However, while developing a stronger linguistic base is undeniably a necessary part of a language learner's journey, anxious learners may become overly focused on it, leading to a cycle of anxious thoughts and self-doubt (King, 2014; Kitano, 2001; Maher & King, 2020). King's (2014) study found that anxious learners can become overly aware of themselves, and their attention becomes heavily focused on their ability in the target language. The following interview excerpt is an example of how an anxious learner can perceive their silence as a lack of ability and focus on that factor. In this part of the interview, Himeka described a specific in-class speaking experience with her classmates. Himeka explained how she had paused a few times because she could not remember the expression she wanted to use. She then felt in the way - *jama* in Japanese, because of her English level and ended her turn early, asking her friend to help by taking over her speaking turn.

Kate: When that happened, what did you feel?

Himeka: Oh, I was disappointed. I was sad. But I recognised that I needed help.

Kate: So your friend's help was a positive thing?

Himeka: Positive. I was grateful she helped me.

Kate: Some people, might think 'don't help me,' but you were thankful. And then during that moment, do you remember anything else how you were feeling?

Himeka: Heavy feeling.

Kate: Heavy?

Himeka: I, my heavy feeling. And I thought I wasn't able to continue the conversation. 'I'm *jama*,' I thought.

In this case, Himeka was focused on her lack of proficiency. When I asked her about being *jama*, she returned to her worries about lack of vocabulary and poor pronunciation, despite her worries about not wanting to disturb her classmates which suggested that a non-linguistic factor was also influencing her silent behaviour. If anxious learners perceive their silence as a breakdown in their ability, they may struggle to develop effective coping strategies to improve their language skills and deal with their speaking anxiety to reduce their silent behaviours (Curry, 2014; Curry et al., 2020). They may become disheartened and increasingly anxious about speaking if their efforts to improve their linguistic knowledge do not result in a more confident speaking performance. Some learners may not be aware of other factors, making it difficult to reduce their anxiety and silent behaviours.

4.3. Reframing silence: Underlying factors that influenced silent behaviours

In the previous section, the findings demonstrated how several participants' initial explanations of what caused their in-class silent behaviours and anxiety were often related to self-doubt about linguistic ability. This section looks at factors that emerged during the CBT-based formulation and reframing activity in the second and third interviews. In these interviews, the participants described their silent moments in more depth by comparing negative and positive experiences of in-class speaking situations to identify underlying factors that led to silence and anxiety. The findings suggest that after considering their silent behaviours using the CBT-style formulation and reframing activity, participants became aware of other underlying factors. The core themes of these other factors are related to the social performance of speaking in the classroom and navigating interpersonal relationships with peers in the target language. Having used King's (2014; King & Smith, 2017) model to analyse the interview data, I present the next set of findings based on the two most prominent factors that became evident during coding: feared predictions and self-focus image.

4.3.1 Feared predictions

The feared predictions participants described when talking about silence and speaking anxiety in the classroom tended to be about their peers. Most participants expressed concerns about how their linguistic mistakes would lead to their classmates not understanding them or being seen as dull or annoying when they spoke English. These fears suggest that while the participants' doubts about their linguistic ability influenced their silent behaviours, in some cases, they were not aiming for a fluent performance for themselves, but for their classmates. The fear of a low-level performance, categorised as choosing a boring topic to talk about, making mistakes or pausing, had more social consequences for these learners than academic ones. King's studies (2014; King & Smith, 2017) also show how classmates can be a central factor in anxious learners' negative thoughts due to the fear of being judged and rejected by their peers. Other studies (Greer, 2000; Harumi, 2015; King, 2013) have shown how language learners are often motivated by trying to fit in with their peers, prioritising peer evaluation over academic evaluation by the teacher. The following interview extract is an example of how a participant's negative thoughts about their silence were related to fears about how classmates would react, showing how some anxious learners can become focused on those around them rather than their linguistic performance. In my interviews with Nene, she described worrying about pausing during her speaking turn. In our first interview, she attributed her pauses to not having sufficient vocabulary to speak smoothly. She explained that if she made more effort to memorise new vocabulary, she would become a more fluent speaker. During the reframing activity, I used a questioning technique to challenge her negative thoughts to discover if there were other factors behind her negative perception of pausing.

Nene: And I, when I was panicked, he or she is waiting for me to speak. And waiting. So, I can't say the word quickly.

Kate: But that's OK if they're waiting, isn't it? We all wait for people....

Nene: Mmmm. I, I care about, I am very concerned about their reaction...I, I feel like, like she or he are troubled. So as much as I can, I say something quickly, and I want, I don't want to stop talking, so I say 'I'm thinking now. I'm thinking now.'

Kate: So, that quiet time makes you nervous?

Nene: Yes. Very nervous. I hate the quiet. I am disturbing them.

During the reframing activity, it became apparent that fearing her classmates' reactions affected Nene. Seeing a negative facial reaction seemed to confirm her feared prediction that her spoken English troubles her partner, especially if she goes quiet while trying to say the word she wants to use, making them wait. Nene's fears of a negative reaction to her silent behaviour made her anxious about speaking, and in turn, resulted in further silence, such as ending her speaking turn earlier than expected, and in some cases, she reported avoiding speaking because she was too nervous.

The interviews revealed that for some of the participants their fears were not merely about looking bad in front of their peers. Several participants expressed guilt for speaking English because it would annoy their classmates, fearing they would make their classmates feel uncomfortable by speaking English. This worry echoes a language-related form of *taijin kyofusho* – a Japanese psychiatric disorder where people fear offending others through their social behaviour (Kirmayer, 1991). For these participants, it emerged that it was not only the worry about a lack of linguistic ability but also the fear that they create an uncomfortable situation for everyone around them by using English.

4.3.2 Self-focus image

Anxious learners can become overly aware of how they look when they speak English in class and are 'distracted into silence' as they search for cues around them to see how others perceive them (King & Smith, 2017). Many of the participants in this study frequently expressed disappointment at their 'poor English,' often specifying lack of vocabulary and 'unnatural' pronunciation. These types of negative thoughts are categorised as 'self-focus image' in King's (2014; King & Smith, 2017) model

as they arise from how the learner sees themselves as a speaker and social object in the classroom. Runa, who often avoided initiating talk, said 'It's strange that I can't make long sentences, only simple English.' A further example was Eri, who talked about how her pronunciation sounded 'very bad' and she did not like to hear herself speak English as several of her classmates had studied abroad and had a more natural accent. After rounds of coding, it became apparent that participants who demonstrated self-focus image thoughts often compared themselves to their peers and noticed a gap, which influenced their in-class behaviours and feelings about speaking. Many of the negative thoughts that I coded as 'self-focus image' included the participants' worries about their classmates thinking they were not good enough at English or doubting their ability after making negative comparisons with their classmates. It became apparent that these participants connected 'I' to 'they' in their self-focus image thoughts, suggesting the prevalence of interpersonal relationships in the classroom as an influential factor.

5. Conclusion

Through using a CBT-based approach, the current study examined how anxious language learners perceive their classroom silence and how it can affect their thoughts and emotions related to speaking in the target language. While some participants saw their silence as 'necessary' at times, overall, they generally had negative perceptions of their silent displays, often explaining silent moments as instances when their English was not 'good enough.' When asked to think about what led to their silence, participants' initial explanations tended to include expressions of self-doubt and negative self-attribution related to their linguistic ability and efforts to develop their language skills. However, after using the CBT techniques of formulation and reframing, other, more potent underlying factors emerged related to the social performance of speaking in front of others and interpersonal relationships with classmates. These findings support existing research (Bao, 2014; King, 2014; Smith & King, 2018), demonstrating the affective influence classroom silence can have on language learners, triggering negative thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, the current study's findings suggest that reframing anxious learners' perspectives of their classroom silence and speaking-related anxiety can provide insights into these phenomena by revealing underlying factors.

Future studies should look to what extent helping learners become more aware of the variety of underlying factors that may trigger negative thoughts about their silence could help them reduce their anxiety. There is great potential for using CBT-based approaches for supporting anxious language learners by helping them identify what it is about speaking the target language in the classroom environment that triggers their anxiety and silence. A CBT-based approach can also train anxious learners to reframe negative thoughts about speaking in class to increase their confidence (see Maher and King, 2022). CBT encourages the person to focus on a behavioural goal they would like to achieve and then uses the formulation of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to assess what barriers are preventing them from reaching the goal (Kennerley et al., 2017). This approach is adaptable to the language classroom where learners are often encouraged to make goals and reflect on them. For example, anxious learners that would like to speak more could use CBT-based reframing activities to create a behavioural goal to increase their oral participation in class by focusing on the form of silence that worries them. After making a focused goal, they can create a CBT-style formulation (with support from the teacher or advisor) to identify related negative thoughts and then look for factors that trigger them. Once learners have determined their triggers, they can develop strategies to prevent those factors from negatively influencing their speaking goals.

Concerning the future application of the findings, one of the main limitations of this study needs to be considered. Although a large corpus of data was generated from the interviews for the purpose of this study, in terms of using a CBT-based approach and the nature of the phenomena being examined, it would have been better to have more than two or three meetings. More time spent with learners would likely make it easier to develop sufficient rapport so they feel at ease to discuss their perceptions of language learning. Moreover, some learners may need more time to understand the CBT concept and may be unfamiliar with this approach to working on their language skills. Finally, it should be remembered that silence can be highly affective for some learners, especially those who attach great significance to its meaning in relation to their language ability. Therefore, any investigation or intervention should be approached with sensitivity.

Declarations

Conflict of interest : The author declares no conflict of interest.

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